



LABORATORY READINESS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

As current events have demonstrated, biological or chemical threats may occur at any time. CDC has determined that maintaining and developing a national laboratory system that is efficient at detecting and timely in reporting such threats is critical to minimize the negative impact of disease or other adverse public health events in the community. A national laboratory system is needed to assure the availability of consistent public health laboratory capacity across the country, as well as ensuring that emergency preparedness protocols are available to all laboratories.

Ultimately, a national laboratory system will protect the health of the nation from bioterrorism, emerging infectious diseases, food-borne diseases, and environmentally associated diseases through collaboration among CDC, public health laboratories, and front-line clinical laboratories (e.g., hospital, academic medical center, and independent laboratories).

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC is working with partners to further develop the concept of a laboratory system for public health. Such a system would have many benefits, including:

- Better detection, response and tracking of infectious diseases;
- Capacity to collect, analyze and distribute test data;
- Assessment of current laboratory practices, equipment and staffing needs; and
- Establishment of a mechanism to make policy and adopt guidelines across states and regions.

Four pilot projects have been established in Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska and Washington. Project states have created a specimen transport system, improved testing for bioterrorism, assessed clinical laboratory capabilities for infectious disease testing, and used assessments to improve laboratory practices (e.g., antimicrobial resistance detection).

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Successful implementation of the National Laboratory System requires coordination between state public health laboratories and each of the constituent laboratories that provide testing of public health importance. The pilot project states will continue their efforts to improve communications and interactions with hospital and independent laboratories. CDC plans to expand this system nationwide, thereby creating the National Laboratory System.

For information on this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs

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